CHAPTER 4: Adjectives and Adverbs

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will investigate two word classes, adjectives and adverbs. Both are used as modifiers and both can function as predicators:

(4.1-1) Clem saw the fat boy.  [Adjective as modifier]
Clem is fat.  [Adjective as predicator]
Alphonse speaks tomorrow.  [Adverb as modifier]
The appointment is tomorrow.  [Adverb as predicator]

Adjectives and especially adverbs are complex classes and there is some debate as to exactly what should be included within them. As a matter of convenience we will, on the whole, take a traditional view of the membership of these classes.

4.2 Adjectivals, Adjectives, and Compounds

The term ‘adjectival’ is a function label, the term ‘adjective’ is the name of a word class. Not all adjectivals are adjectives, and not all adjectives are adjectivals.

‘Adjectival’ is the label assigned to any syntactic constituent, regardless of form, that modifies a noun or pronoun. As illustrated in Section 1.6, adjectivals are a diverse set syntactically. Participles, relative clauses, and prepositional phrases, as well as adjectives, function as adjectivals.

‘Adjective’ is the label given to a word whose major function is the modification of nouns and which denotes qualities or attributes. While this is not a totally satisfactory characterization of adjectives, it will suffice for our limited purposes.

The word class membership of adjectivals is not always easy to determine, especially given the characteristic fluidity of English word classes. For example, in

(4.2-1) the above example

above is sometimes analyzed as an adverb, sometimes as an adjective. Similarly, in

(4.2-2) lamb stew

lamb is variously considered a noun or an adjective. We will take the view here that words in such cases should be analyzed according to the class with which they are typically associated. So, diagrams for the sentences above and

(4.2-3) the tasty cabbage

which has an adjective functioning as an adjectival, are:

(4.2-4)  

Form:  
NP          NP          NP  
Art        Adv             N          NP         N   Art  A      N

Function:  
Adv mod example           Adj mod stew           Adj mod cabbage

the       above           lamb       stew           the       tasty           cabbage

Some words should probably be analyzed as belonging sometimes to one class, sometimes to another. For instance, criminal seems to be a noun in the criminals were sentenced to 15 years, but an adjective in the criminal element prevailed. The words noble, black, classic, juvenile, and many others be-
have similarly. All these words were historically adjectives but came to behave as nouns too. They can all be pluralized and can appear in the associative case.

(4.2-5) There were four blacks and three whites in that combo. This noble’s estates were confiscated during the revolution. Five juveniles were seen entering the store at 5th and Main. Rodney read the classics at the University of Lackawanna.

More than one adjectival can, of course, modify a noun. For example, two adjectives modify a noun in

(4.2-6) the big bad wolf

In this example big and bad modify wolf in strictly parallel fashion: the wolf is big and the wolf is bad. We do not understand big bad wolf such that big modifies bad wolf — it only modifies wolf, just as bad does.

It is entirely possible, however, for modifiers with a noun phrase to be arranged hierarchically, i.e. for one modifier to modify another. We’ve encountered instances of this sort with associative constructions:

(4.2-7) the little boy’s big elephant

In this example, little modifies boy’s, not elephant, and is thus placed inside the phrase of which boy’s is the head. Elephant, in turn, is modified by big and the whole NP the little boy’s: each of these constituents is placed inside elephant’s NP.

Now consider the example:

(4.2-8) French lamb stew

This NP has two distinct interpretations. It can mean either ‘a French stew made of lamb’ or ‘a stew made of French lamb’, i.e. French can be taken to modify either stew or lamb. The two interpretations have different internal structures:
As noted above, the difference between the two structures hinges on what it is *French* modifies: in (4.2-8a) *French* modifies *stew* — the stew is both French and made of lamb. In (4.2-8b), *French* modifies *lamb*, and *French lamb* modifies *stew*. The diagrams are simply a way of mapping these internal structural relations.

Notice that in each of the diagrams above *lamb*, as a noun, has its own NP. This follows from the general principle noted in Chapters 1 and 2 that each noun will always have its own NP. [Noun components of compounds are an exception — see below this section.] There are two reasons why nouns functioning as adjectivals must have their own NPs. First, without a separate NP for *lamb*, the diagram

(4.2-9)

would amount to a claim that this NP has two heads, *lamb* and *stew*, whereas in fact there is just one — *stew* — with *lamb* acting as a modifier of *stew*. The two nouns here have an asymmetrical relationship and cannot be interpreted as being structurally on a par. Second, without a separate NP for *lamb*, there would be no way to distinguish structurally the different meanings diagrammed in (4.2-8a) and (4.2-8b), i.e. to show within a form diagram the different ways that *French* can associate with *lamb* and *stew*.

Incidentally, the structural relation between adjective and noun illustrated by (4.2-8b) provides an argument for considering *lamb* in *lamb stew* to be a noun and not an adjective. The expression *drunken lamb stew* — interpreted as meaning ‘a stew from drunken lambs’ — has the adjective
drunken modifying lamb [and therefore placed within lamb’s NP]. But if lamb is taken to be an adjective, then, since adjectives do not modify adjectives, drunken would have to be replaced by its adverb counterpart drunkenly. But notice that “drunkenly lamb stew” is not grammatical. Thus, we have proof that lamb is a noun in lamb stew.

In collocations like lamb stew, lamb simply modifies stew. However, there is a similar looking construction involving two nouns which does not involve an ordinary relation of modification. In this construction, two nouns combine to form what is known as a COMPOUND, which is, in effect, a combination of words that functions in many respects as a single word. Book dealer is a compound, as is doghouse, junk shop, lighthouse, etc. There is one clear way of differentiating constructions with adjectivals like lamb stew from compounds like lamb chop. Under ordinary conditions, the head of a noun phrase receives more stress than its determiners or modifiers. So the main stress in lamb stew, the tasty cabbage, and so on, is the head noun:

\[(4.2-10)\] lamb stew
the tasty cabbage

In compounds, the entire compound is treated as a single word and the first component of the compound receives the main stress:

\[(4.2-11)\] book dealers
doghouse
data shop
lighthouse

Compare lamb stew with the compound lamb chop. Collocations of adjective and noun can also form compounds, e.g. blackboard, blackbird, greenhouse, etc. The stress follows the same pattern as in compounds consisting of two nouns:

\[(4.2-12)\] blackboard [Compound]
blackboard [Black modifies board]

Notice that a black board must be black, but a blackboard needn’t be — green blackboards are now fairly common.

This last fact underlines a characteristic of compounds, namely that they are treated as single units and not simply as a sum of their separate parts, which separates them from modification relationships. Form-function diagrams for compounds will show this by indicating that compounds are nouns consisting of a pair of nouns or an adjective and a noun:

\[(4.2-13)\] lamb stew
lamb chop

Form:

NP

[NP
N lamb stew
N lamb chop

Function: Adj mod stew
Like other nouns, compounds can be modified:

(4.2-14) French bóok dealers

Form:

```
NP
A
N
French book dealers
```

Function: Adjl mod bóok dealers

This noun phrase refers to bóok dealers who are French. These same three words can also combine to form French book déalers, i.e. dealers of French books. This will be diagrammed as:

(4.2-15)

Form:

```
NP
A
N
 French book dealers
```

Function: Adjl mod dealers

Notice that French book dealers cannot be diagrammed as

(4.2-16)

Form:

```
NP
A
NP
N
 French book dealers
```

Function: Adjl mod dealers
because this would claim that French modifies dealers [i.e. the dealers would have to be French], when in fact it modifies book [i.e. the books are French].

Compounds can also serve as modifiers. In

(4.2-17) junk yard odors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form:</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>junk</td>
<td>yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>odors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Function: Adj mod odors

the compound junk yard modifies the noun odors.

The semantic difference between modification relationships and compounds is a bit complicated and cannot be discussed here in detail. However, some differences between these constructions can be illustrated by comparing the following:

(4.2-18) lady killer [Compound: ‘a man given to amorous conquests of women’]
lady killer [Modification relationship: ‘a killer who is a woman’]

The modification relationship lady killer requires an interpretation where the referent is both a killer and a lady, i.e. both the head and the modifier individually express characteristics of the referent. The function of the modifier is, as always, to narrow down the range of referents that the head can refer to: lady killers are a subset of killers.

But in the compound lady killer the relationship between lady and killer, and indeed the sense of the whole construction, is not literal but rather idiomatic, and while such idiomacity is not criterial for compounds, it is nonetheless frequently encountered with them. Recall the difference between black board and blackboard, where the latter, a compound, need not actually be black — whereas the former must — and need not even be a board, as in electronic blackboard.

In English, compounds are sometimes written as single words [e.g. blackboard, doghouse, light-house] and sometimes as two words [book dealers, lamb chop, junkyard]. This difference is often said to be related to the frequency of the compound, i.e. more frequently uttered compounds are written as one word. But the matter is really much more arbitrary than this — lighthouses aren’t more frequently encountered or discussed than lamb chops or junk yards. One generalization does hold, though: compounds consisting of polysyllabic words are never written as single words [e.g. Commerce Secretary, Treasury Department, and the like].

German, a close relative of English, has virtually the same compounding patterns that English does, and a much more consistent orthographic convention for dealing with them. Compounds in German are always written as single words. For instance, the English compound church tower has a German counterpart Kirchturm, consisting of kirche ‘church’, and Turm ‘tower’ like its English translation. Unlike English, German orthography treats even compounds of polysyllabic words as single orthographic units. These can look quite formidable, but linguistically speaking they are not different from their English counterparts; they differ only in orthography. For example, the English compound life insurance company [note the initial stress] translates into German as Lebensversicherungsgesellschaft [Leben ‘life’, Versicherung ‘insurance’, Gesellschaft ‘company’]. Linguistically speaking, they represent the same construction, namely they are both compounds, but orthographic traditions make them look different. Life insurance company is diagrammed as:
One last word about compounds: compounds need to be distinguished from ‘fixed expressions’. Fixed expressions are sequences of words that have come to be used as titles, place names and so on. Like compounds, fixed expressions may involve special meanings, i.e. meanings that are not a product of the meanings of their component parts. For our purposes, fixed expressions differ from compounds in their stress placement: whereas compound nouns are always stressed on the first syllable, fixed expressions have the ordinary attributive stress, i.e. they have stress on the head of the NP, which is typically the last element.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compounds</th>
<th>Fixed expressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red Sox</td>
<td>Red Séa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Réd Deer (Alberta)</td>
<td>Red Cróss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>réd eye</td>
<td>red méat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White House</td>
<td>White Séa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrýsler Building</td>
<td>Pacific Ócean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Séa Islands</td>
<td>Long Island</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Adjectives

4.3.1 Syntactic Function of Adjectives

We have already considered two functions of adjectives, viz. their role as modifiers of nouns and their role as predicators. When an adjective modifies a noun it is said to have ATTRIBUTIVE function; as a predicator it has PREDICATIVE function.

Adjective modifiers of nouns can either be preposed or postposed (Section 2.1). The great majority of adjectives in English normally occur in preposed position, but there are instances of postposed adjectives. Postposed adjectives occur in some legal or political collocations.

(4.3-1) attorney general
postmaster general
notary public
heir apparent
court martial

Some adjectives have a different sense in preposed and postposed position:

(4.3-2) the City of Tonawanda proper ‘as strictly defined’
the proper City of Tonawanda ‘decorous, displaying exaggerated propriety’

Following pronouns, however, all adjectives are postposed:

(4.2-3) Indefinite pronouns Associative pronouns
someone silly my own [room]
*a silly someone *own my room

Their use, however, is best regarded as a predicative, not attributive, use, the adjective resulting from a reduction of a relative clause:
Someone [who is] silly

This is true as well for almost all other instances of postposition, the exceptions being the legal or political senses described above.

The house [which is] ablaze is on Zeke’s street
the people [who are] asleep shouldn’t be disturbed
the criminals [who were] involved were punished

Adjectives can also function as objective complements:

he liked his steak rare

As mentioned in Section 1.4, objective complements are really just special sorts of predicators.

The fourth function of adjectives is their occurrence as heads of noun phrases.

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These adjectives must be distinguished from historic adjectives which have evolved into nouns, such as criminal, black, noble, etc. First, adjective heads cannot be inflected for number or case, whereas nouns can:

the poor are eating
criminal is eating

Lastly, adjective heads can be modified by adverbials, indeed must be modified by adverbials since they are adjectives, but nouns can only be modified by adjectives:

the desperately poor are eating
criminal is eating

The fifth and last use we will consider here is the use of adjectives as FREE ADJECTIVES (FA). An FA use of the adjective occurs when it is neither attributive nor predicative and does not function as an argument of a predicator [i.e. does not function as a head of a noun phrase], but instead functions as a kind of adjunct, supplying supplementive background information to the main force of the sentence:

unhappy, she decided to leave the bazaar
strange, it was Roscoe who ate the pie
drunk, they are a bunch of feeble-minded idiots
nervous, he opened the door to Mr. Hardnose’s office

These are mentioned only for the sake of completeness and will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

The uses of adjectives are summarized below:

the unhappy penguins

the penguin is unhappy

someone unhappy

the king made his subjects unhappy

the unhappy depress Algernon

unhappy, he decided to call Dr. Ripoff

ATTRIBUTIVE
PREDICATIVE
OBJECTIVE COMPLEMENT
HEAD OF NOUN PHRASE
FREE ADJECTIVE
Kinds of Modification

There are two sorts of relations that an adjective can have with a noun, whether the adjective has an attributive or predicative function. We will refer to these as REFERENCE MODIFICATION and REFERENT MODIFICATION. In order to understand the difference between these, it is necessary first to examine the semantics of a class of nouns. Common nouns, for example, those referring to human beings such as friend, soldier, mother, president, and so on, refer both to roles played by people and to people themselves. So, the soldier can refer either to an individual acting in the role of a soldier or to a person who happens to be a soldier. The difference between the two is brought out when we modify the noun. Consider, for example,

(4.3-13)  the good soldier

This is ambiguous between the two interpretations of soldier. In one interpretation, good modifies the role of being a soldier — i.e. the individual is good as a soldier, but he may otherwise not be a good person. The other interpretation has good modify the individual, not the role: The individual is claimed to be both a good person and a soldier, but he may not be good as a soldier. Where adjectives like good modify the role a noun expresses, we refer to it as reference modification. Where adjectives modify the individual underlying the role, we refer to it as referent modification. As a further example, consider:

(4.3-14)  my old friend

When old modifies the reference indicated by friend, it modifies the role. So in this interpretation, the individual could be a longtime friend [old as a friend] but might be a young person. If old modifies the referent underlying friend, it is the individual who is stated to be old. These interpretations are summarized below:

(4.3-15)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference modification</th>
<th>Referent modification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the good soldier</td>
<td>[good at being a soldier]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my old friend</td>
<td>[a good person who is also a soldier]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[a longtime friend, old as a friend]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[an old person who is also my friend]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attributive adjectives are potentially ambiguous between the two interpretations where the sense of the adjective and the noun permit. Some attributive adjectives, however, only allow a reference modification interpretation.

(4.3-16)  

| a mere child                               |
|                                            |
| a crack salesman                           |
| an utter fool                               |

These adjectives only modify reference [or roles], not individuals: it is not the person underlying the salesman who is ‘crack’, but rather he is ‘crack’ in his role as a salesman. Adjectives with predicative function only allow a referent modification interpretation. So in

(4.3-17)  

| the soldier is good                         |
| my friend is old                           |

only the referent modification emerges. Notice that the adjectives that admit only a reference modification interpretation do not occur with predicative function:

(4.3-18)  

*the child is mere                           |
*the salesman is crack                       |
*the fool is utter                           |

Adjective-noun compounds seem to admit only reference modification interpretations. For example, the compound English teacher [note the initial, compound stress] has reference modification
[English modifies the role as teacher and so the phrase refers to a teacher of English], but the attributive adjective in English teacher [note the stress on the head noun teacher] modifies the individual underlying the role and proclaims him or her to be of English nationality. Notice that the predicative use of English predictably has referent modification:

(4.3-19) The teacher is English.

Because the two sorts of modification are so different, it is not redundant to say:

(4.3-20) the English teacher.

This is diagrammed as:

(4.3-21)

Form: \[ \text{Art} \rightarrow \text{A} \rightarrow \text{N} \]

Function: Adj\text{ modifying} \space \text{English teacher}

There are a number of adjectives which do not normally occur with attributive function, but instead have only predicative function: asleep, ablaze, afraid, awake, afloat, etc. As we might predict, these adjectives have only referent modification interpretations:

(4.3-22) the child is asleep
the soldier is afraid

In both examples, it is the individual, not the role, that is being modified.

4.3.3 Paired Adjectives

English adjectives of quality or measure typically occur in pairs of antonyms, such as good/bad, tall/short, wide/narrow, etc. In pairs of this sort, one adjective always functions as the neutral or generic cover term for the common quality expressed in both members of the pair. For example, in asking a question like

(4.3-23) How wide is it?

an appropriate answer could be either:

(4.3-24) very wide
very narrow

However, in asking a question like

(4.3-25) How narrow is it?

An appropriate answer could be

(4.3-26) very narrow
but not:

(4.3-27) *very wide

Similarly:

(4.3-28) How old is he? How young is he?
Very old *Very old
Very young Very young

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How strong is he?  How weak is he?

Very strong       *Very strong
Very weak        Very weak

The neutral term can be used to ask questions when a particular sort of answer is not presupposed. That is, one can frame a question with the adjective *wide* when one doesn’t know whether the object in question is wide or narrow. But framing a question with the non-neutral adjective *narrow* presupposes that the object in question is, in fact, narrow. A short list of paired adjectives is provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Non-neutral</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Non-neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>old</td>
<td>young, new</td>
<td>wide</td>
<td>narrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tall</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>strong</td>
<td>weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>true</td>
<td>false</td>
<td>smart</td>
<td>dumb, stupid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>bad</td>
<td>wise</td>
<td>unwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hot</td>
<td>cold</td>
<td>far</td>
<td>near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>heavy</td>
<td>light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>slow</td>
<td>light</td>
<td>dark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the neutral term refers to the more positive sense, or the one that expresses the quality in greater degree, either impressionistically, or in terms of countable units of measure.

4.3.4 Adjective Phrases

We have already discussed various types of phrases: noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases. Each of these are grammatical units named after the most important word they contain, referred to as the head. One additional sort of phrase is the ADJECTIVE PHRASE. Just as all nouns occur in noun phrases, all adjectives occur in adjective phrases. This means that a noun phrase like

(4.3-30) the sleazy bar

should properly be diagrammed as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form:</th>
<th>NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>sleazy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Function: Adj mod bar

Adjectives are heads of adjective phrases, just as nouns are heads of noun phrases.

Besides the head adjective, adjective phrases may contain other sorts of elements including adverbial modifiers of the head adjective, prepositional phrases, infinitives, and various other syntactic structures. Some illustrations follow:

(4.3-32) an extremely sleazy bar
Zeke is worried about you
Hermann is afraid to leave
The first of these can be diagrammed as:

```
(4.3.33)    NP
  Form:      Art  AP     N
            Adv  A  
the extremely sleazy bar

  Function: Adj mod bar
            Advl mod sleazy
```

When attributive adjective phrases contain elements other than the head adjectives and preposed adverb modifiers, they must be postposed:

(4.3-34)  a hat too small to wear  
*a too small to wear hat

These complex adjective phrases will be further discussed in later chapters.

4.4 Participles

Participles were briefly discussed in connection with the verb complex in Chapter 3. There it was shown that they figure as obligatory constituents of the verb complex following certain auxiliaries. Participles can also function as modifiers of nouns. This is, perhaps, their most basic function because participles are basically verbal adjectives. They are the form taken by verbs when they modify nouns. So, instead of saying

(4.4-1)  *a swim dog

or the like, we use a participle:

(4.4-2)  a swimming dog

There are two sorts of participles, the ING-participle and the EN-participle. Both sorts of participles can be used attributively:

(4.4-3)  an entertaining movie
         a disgusting spectacle
         an escaped prisoner
         a grown woman

Like other sorts of adjectives, participles are postposed when they are accompanied by syntactic elements other than preposed adverbs. So,

(4.4-4)  the offended man

is acceptable, but

(4.4-5)  *the offended by the policeman man

is not. The participle and the accompanying prepositional phrase must be postposed to make the noun phrase acceptable:

(4.4-6)  the man offended by the policeman

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